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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 005971

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [IR](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: DEMARCHES ON POTENTIAL S-300 SALE TO IRAN

Classified By: DCM Daniel Russell for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) Summary: In response to multiple demarches from the DCM, senior MFA officials have alluded to, but not confirmed a potential sale of the S-300 air defense system to Iran based on an unspecified contract which predated UNSCR 1737. When challenged that a Russian Government agency has publicly stated that an S-300 sale is not now taking place or under consideration, the MFA officials implied that the public statement was accurate today, but might not be in the future. MFA officials refused to be pinned down on a timetable for a potential sale or delivery. It was clear from the conversations that the Russians believe Iran made this potential sale public at this time to tweak the U.S. In any event, the MFA officials reiterated that the S-300 was a defensive weapons system and its transfer would not violate international sanctions regimes. They also claimed that the U.S. should not have been surprised since President Putin referred to an existing S-300 contract with Iran in a December 2006 telephone conversation that preceded UNSCR 11737. End Summary.

12. (C) On December 27, the DCM raised U.S. objections to the transfer of the S-300 air defense missile system to Iran with MFA Security Affairs and Disarmament Department Director Anatoliy Antonov, in the absence of Deputy Foreign Minister Kislyak. The DCM reiterated our concern that the supply of this system would undercut the objectives of UNSCR 1737 and increase risks to coalition assets in the region. Antonov acknowledged our multiple approaches about longstanding concerns on the transfer of this weapons system to Iran, but said:

-- The U.S. should have not been surprised by news of a possible Russian sale of S-300s to Iran: "We're not trying to hide anything from you." Antonov claimed that President Putin had mentioned an existing contract with Iran with the President in a call months ago.

-- The S-300 is defensive in nature. Antonov acknowledged the S-300 was indeed a relatively sophisticated system, but argued it had no offensive capability; therefore, it was not destabilizing. Acknowledging UNSCRs and shared goals vis-a-vis Iran's nuclear program, Antonov nonetheless reiterated the legalistic view that the transfer of a defensive conventional arms system violated no international sanctions regime.

13. (C) Antonov did complain that he did not understand why the Iranians had chosen to make the sale public at this time, "except to tweak Washington." On the timing of a potential S-300 sale or delivery, Antonov would not be pinned down, saying only that it was not imminent.

14. (U) Later the same day (December 27), Russia's Federal Military-Technical Cooperation Service (FSVTS) publicly denied the existence of current plans to supply Iran with the S-300. The FSVTS statement read, "the delivery of S-300

systems to Iran, which has arisen in the press, is not currently taking place, is not being considered, and is not being discussed at this time with the Iranian side." (FSVTS is formally responsible for military-technical cooperation and reports through First Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Ivanov to the President; FSVTS's current relationship with Rosoboronexport is unclear, following the latter's subordination to the Military Industrial Commission in 2006.)

15. (C) On December 28, DCM again raised the S-300 transfer separately with Antonov and with MFA North America Department Director Neverov, pointing out the obvious contradictions between Antonov's initial private comments and the subsequent FSVTS public statement. Antonov stated that he stood by what he had said the previous day. On the FSVTS statement, he said that it must be read "carefully" pointing to the present tense and use of the "current." Antonov refused to be pinned down on any details or any timeframe for a forthcoming S-300 sale or delivery.

16. (C) DCM delivered our points separately to Neverov, who clarified to which presidential telephone call Antonov had referred. The call took place on December 23, 2006. Neverov claimed that, in response to the President's request for Russian support of draft UNSCR 1737, Putin said Russia would be ready to support 1737, but pressed for an understanding that the resolution would cover contracts signed after its adoption but not before. Neverov claimed that Putin specifically referred to an existing contract on S-300s for Iran, stating that there had been no deliveries yet, but that if things went well, in terms of both relations with Iran and managing its nuclear aspirations, Russia would proceed and be within its full rights to do so.

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17. (C) Comment: Beyond the presumptions that the Iran's S-300 announcement surprised Moscow and FSVTS did not bother with interagency coordination before going public, the Russian Government's lack of clarity does not inspire confidence. We tend to doubt that Antonov, one of the MFA's senior arms control/arms sales experts and most careful diplomats, would get his facts wrong with us on this sensitive issue. Our assumption is that there is an existing umbrella contract for S-300 deliveries, but the timing of a sale and delivery has not yet been worked out.
RUSSELL